ForComment promotes teamwork

Teamwork, a collaborative effort aimed at producing the best ideas, is considered one of the most important characteristics of a successful business. That ability is now available electronically in a program called ForComment.

With the program, an attorney or an executive who has prepared an important contract and wants input on it can get it — from all 10 of his colleagues!

The program, designed for IBM PCs and PC-compatible computers, lets up to 16 people comment on a particular contract or document and records their remarks clearly and concisely for the original author's review.

Segal

Last week I reviewed a similar program called CompareRite, which compares just two versions of the same document and shows the differences between them. For-Comment takes CompareRite's ability to highlight additions and deletions a few steps further. With ForComment, up to 16 people can review a single document, either independently or together, and show their comments within the text itself or as end notes. Whether you use all the reviewers' ideas to improve your work is up to you.

Here are the advantages of ForComment, compared with CompareRite:

✔ ForComment automatically adds the initials and date to the comments of everyone who reviews your document, giving you an ongoing record of everyone's suggestions. CompareRite, on the other hand, gives you the cumulative comments and changes of all who reviewed the document, but does not distinguish among the comments of various reviewers. You may, for instance, value one person's comments more highly than another's, and this distinction is lost with CompareRite.

✔ ForComment also takes an amended document and puts it back into your original word processing program. A document written in WordPerfect, for example, can be amended in ForComment and then exported back to Word-Perfect for printing.

✔ ForComment lets you decide whether you want the reviewers to have access to each other's comments. In the "serial" alternative, each reviewer looks at the document in turn and adds his or her comments, with access to each previous reviewer's comments. Using the "parallel" method, each reviewer adds his or her comments independently. In this way, if different reviewers make the same comments over and over again, you may judge those to be more important than comments mentioned only once. Each method has its advantages depending on the situation.

✔ ForComment also comes with a clear, on-line tutorial, with separate disks for authors and reviewers.

All in all, it's a much more complex program than CompareRite, with more capabilities. That complexity is also a drawback. If getting 15 comments on your document is important to you, then 15 people have to learn to use the program — and that's not particularly easy. CompareRite doesn't require this; it simply compares two already written documents and points out what was changed.

A product of Broderbund Software of San Rafael, Calif., ForComment comes in two versions: a single-user version for $195, and a network version for $995.